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2007



Food Stamp Facts

Disaster Situations



The Food Stamp Program enables low-income households to buy more food of a greater variety to improve their diets. Participants pay a small sum of money — the amount based on family size and net monthly income — and receive a larger value of food stamps, which can be spent like money in participating food stores. This program is designed to provide food assistance to low-income households either on a continuing or an as-needed basis.

In areas operating the Food Stamp Program, food stamp benefits are available to victims of disasters ranging from individual misfortune such as a loss of family home by fire or flood, to large-scale disasters such as a hurricane, earthquake, flood, or some other major catastrophe.

In the case of individual misfortune, the Food Stamp Program provides for the needs of affected households through a personal hardship provision in the regular program procedures.

During large-scale disasters, when there are authorized retail facilities available with adequate stocks of food, the Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) may declare the entire affected area eligible for emergency food stamp assistance.

The following questions and answers concern food stamp assistance during large-scale disaster situations:

1. WHAT IS A DISASTER?

A disaster is a loss of food purchasing power through fire, hurricane, tornado, flood, storm, or other catastrophes severe enough to warrant federal assistance. In areas which operate the Food Stamp Program the regular program can be converted into an emergency plan which issues free food stamps to all adversely affected households. Presidential declaration of a disaster area is not necessarily a prerequisite or indication that the emergency plan is warranted.

2. WHEN IS THE EMERGENCY FOOD STAMP PLAN PUT INTO EFFECT?

When the effects of the disaster occurrence are felt to be long-term, FNS has found that the normal program procedures can best serve the food assistance needs of disaster victims. Under normal program procedures, households may be certified for more than one month if their income is expected to be reduced for an extended period. When the disaster situation occurs unexpectedly and the effects will be felt only for a short period of time, emergency procedures may go into effect. Households who experience a temporary reduction in income as a result of the disaster and are certified under the emergency procedures may receive up to one month's issuance of food stamps at no cost.

3. WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR THIS ASSISTANCE?

Households who have been adversely affected by a disaster should report their situation to the local welfare office to see if they are eligible for food stamp assistance. This applies to persons living either temporarily or permanently in disaster-affected sections of a food stamp area.

4. WHAT ARE THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS?

In order to be certified for food assistance, households must meet the following criteria —

- Reside either temporarily or permanently within the limits of the disaster project area,
- Have access to cooking facilities, and
- Need food stamp assistance because of a reduction or inaccessibility of income or cash resources as a result of the disaster.

5. HOW DO I APPLY?

The head of a household, spouse, or an authorized representative must visit the local welfare office (or an established disaster relief center) and apply. The application requires the applicant to provide family size, address and names of all household members as well as information regarding the household's need for food assistance.

6. HOW MANY STAMPS WILL I RECEIVE?

Households who are certified eligible for emergency food stamps will receive an allotment of coupons based on household size. Households who receive coupons under regular program procedures may be charged a purchase requirement. There is no charge for an emergency coupon issuance.

7. HOW LONG ARE THE STAMPS GOOD FOR?

There is no time limit on the use of food stamps. Households may use their food stamps at participating stores until they are used up. In the event FNS extends the disaster designation beyond the original period, households may receive an additional emergency allotment if they continue to meet the requirements.

8. IS THERE A SPECIAL WAY TO USE FOOD STAMPS?

The food stamps you receive are taken to an FNS authorized food store. Food stamps can buy all foods for human consumption. Food stamps cannot be used to buy alcoholic beverages, soap, cigarettes or paper goods.

9. WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES ONCE THE STAMPS ARE RECEIVED?

Any household that is certified to receive food stamps is obligated by law not to misuse them in any way. They cannot be sold, given away or used to pay back bills or credit accounts.

10. WHEN THE EMERGENCY IS OVER CAN I STILL RECEIVE FOOD STAMPS?

If you have been certified to receive food stamps under emergency standards, you may apply at the welfare office to continue participation after emergency issuance ends. You must meet the standards for the regular program in order to continue to receive the stamps.

11. WILL I HAVE TO REPAY THE MONEY FOR THE STAMPS ONCE THE EMERGENCY IS OVER?

No. If your application was accurate and correct, no repayment is required.

12. WILL THERE BE SOMEONE TO HELP ME IF I NEED IT?

People from disaster relief agencies — or the welfare office — will be available to speed up the process of getting disaster-affected households the food help they need.

Any food stamp participant may request a fair hearing if he feels a decision regarding his participation has been unfair. Each household should be informed of its right to a fair hearing at the time of application. The standards for participation in the Food Stamp Program are the same for everyone without regard to race, color, religious creed, sex, national origin, or political beliefs.

FOR FULL AND COMPLETE INFORMATION, CONTACT YOUR LOCAL FOOD STAMP CERTIFICATION OR WELFARE OFFICE

The Food Stamp Facts series include:

- Allotments and Purchase Requirements (FNS-70)
- Work Registration (FNS-71)
- Eligibility Requirements (FNS-72)
- Fair Hearing (FNS-73)
- Household Income Deductions (FNS-74)
- Meals-On-Wheels (FNS-75)
- Recipient Responsibility (FNS-76)
- Disaster Situations (FNS-99)